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Chairman: Mr. Hachami ..... (Tunisia)
later: Ms. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 100: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/53/3, A/53/63–S/1998/100, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/97, 294, 350, 356, 378, 416 and 425)

1. **Mr. Kallehauge** (Denmark) said that nearly five years had passed since the General Assembly had adopted the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and that it was time to evaluate to what extent the Rules had been implemented. The disability movement was looking forward to follow-up activities from the Organization to enhance their implementation. The Special Rapporteur on Disability and his panel of experts were doing an excellent job with a very limited budget at their disposal. Denmark, which had donated US$ 100,000 for that work, called on other Governments to contribute.

2. The Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-fourth session, had adopted resolution 1998/31 on the human rights of persons with disabilities, which provided, *inter alia*, that any violation of the fundamental principle of equality and any discrimination against persons with disabilities was an infringement of their human rights.

3. In honour of the International Day of Disabled Persons in December 1998, the International Disability Foundation would publish a world report on disability. All Governments should call the attention of their experts to that report because awareness of the rights, needs and potential of disabled persons was a precondition for their equal participation, with the rest of society, in the life of the nation.

4. **Ms. Pedersen** (Denmark) said that in spite of all that separated young persons at the cultural, religious, political and economic levels, there were certain qualities that they shared. In the space of a few years, they all faced many challenges. They were vulnerable, often excluded from the decision-making process, particularly in the case of young women that was a violation of their personal freedom and had a negative influence on their development. They were energetic, idealistic and the fact that they were the adults of the future and represented an ever growing sector of the global population, meant that they were a force to be reckoned with.

5. As highlighted during the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon in August 1998, young persons were not just a part of the problem, they were also part of the solution. As stated in the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenants, human rights were of particular concern to young persons. They should be able to play a role in society and should therefore be taught from an early age about democracy, solidarity and tolerance. The United Nations, in cooperation with non-governmental youth organizations, should also place greater emphasis on their rights, and the international community should take greater interest in their problems and potential contribution. Youth participation was a precondition for human development.

6. **Monsignor Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that at the dawn of the third millennium, the world had not yet arrived at a consensus in the social field. The World Summit for Social Development, which had enjoyed the support of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, had nevertheless made it possible to reach consensus on a number of principles to be followed to improve living conditions for all, guarantee the development of society, establish links between human rights and freedom, economic growth, the protection of the environment and well-being for all human beings. The Holy See attached great importance to the World Summit for Social Development and hoped that the commitments made by Heads of State and Government at that forum, in particular in the area of family life, poverty, economic and social development, partnerships with non-governmental organizations and employment, would be fully respected.

7. Conscious of the valuable role that older persons played in society, the Holy See applauded the launching of the International Year of Older Persons, which would provide an opportunity to highlight the talents, wealth of knowledge and experience of that sector of the population and also to demonstrate their needs and reflect on how the world community could respond to them.

8. The Holy See had also participated in the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, which had pointed out that future generations would be the beneficiaries of sustainable development. In his Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II stated that life was always a good; there was a need, above all, to see persons with disabilities as people. The United Nations should continue to emphasize the sacred dignity of human life, and the international community should recognize that the family unit offered the greatest protection for the human being. Absolute poverty should moreover be eliminated and the cycle of poverty must be broken.

9. The last decade of the twentieth century would long be remembered as a time of violence and bloodshed. The scars left by ethnic hatred, disregard for human life and armed conflict must heal, and industry, agriculture and trade should be allowed to prosper. The representatives of the international community who would participate in the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development should find solutions to those problems before the work towards social development could continue.

10. Official development assistance was essential. As the basis of the solidarity that was the very nature of humanity, it ensured sustainable development that was inseparable from human rights. Globalization must make it possible to build a society in which everyone could participate.

11. **Mr. Beyendeza** (Uganda) said that he supported the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and commended the successful outcome of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon in August 1998 in which his country had participated.

12. The World Summit for Social Development had set the objective of eradicating absolute poverty. The Ugandan Government had identified four ways to achieve that goal: developing human resources through education for all; industrialization and developing the private sector; improving the infrastructure and modernizing the agricultural sector.

13. In many African countries, the outbreak of armed conflict and the scourge of HIV/AIDS had left many young people homeless and deprived of nourishment, health care and education. The family, which was the foundation of any society, was unable to play its traditional role and the phenomena of streetchildren, and the abandonment of disabled and older persons were spreading.

14. Uganda viewed education as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty. In 1997, it had launched a universal primary education programme, which practically doubled enrolment. The Government had also established a fund to fight poverty, which would finance a number of social projects, but there was need for additional resources. It therefore launched an appeal to the international community for assistance and was grateful to countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which had already extended aid in that area. The decentralization of the decision-making process had allowed Uganda to make significant progress over recent years, both in the industrial and agricultural sectors and in education.

15. In conclusion, his delegation wished to stress that the World Summit for Social Development could bear fruit only if the international community honoured its commitments and the United Nations guaranteed follow-up action.

16. **Ms. Gittens-Joseph** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the primary aim of social development should be the promotion of social integration and the participation of all people. Governments, in partnership with civil society and the international community, were responsible for achieving that objective. The financial crisis currently faced by many countries of the world was having a negative impact on the populations of the affected countries, and international agencies, especially the international financial institutions, needed to give more consideration to the social consequences of their policies and programmes.

17. In 1995, the General Assembly had adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which acknowledged that young people were agents, beneficiaries and victims of change and as such should seek not only to be integrated into an existing order but also aim to transform that order. Regional and interregional conferences of ministers responsible for youth, such as the one that had recently been held in Lisbon, and the third session of the World Youth Forum, held in Braga, Portugal, in August 1998, had a vital role to play in that respect. States members of CARICOM, sometimes in cooperation with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, had launched many programmes to benefit the young people and increase their participation in national development. The aim of such programmes was to create employment opportunities, provide training, reform the educational system and improve the self-image of young people. In cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the CARICOM secretariat had organized meetings and activities for young people. It had also requested funding from UNFPA for a major project to encourage the development of entrepreneurship among young people in five countries of the region. Under the leadership of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a number of United Nations agencies were contributing to the implementation of health and family life education programmes in schools.

18. Since young people always had so much to learn from older people, and since interaction between generations should be encouraged, the States members of CARICOM had launched programmes to encourage such interaction. While it was true that increased life expectancy was one of

the greatest achievements of the century, it had also caused unprecedented problems. Women were living longer than men and were often poorer in old age; it was therefore essential to ensure their economic security. The question of ageing and urbanization also required careful study. The Governments of countries in the Caribbean region, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and academic institutions, were actively involved in preparations for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. Consideration had also been given to the health-care needs of older persons. In 1994, the conference of CARICOM Ministers of Health had approved the Caribbean Health Promotion Charter and, in 1998, the Caribbean Forum on Health and Ageing had been held in the Bahamas. The outcome of the Forum had been a draft charter on health and ageing, which should help countries of the region formulate plans and programmes for older persons, focusing on their economic security and appropriate care facilities.

19. Disabled persons were another group that required special attention. They must be treated on an equal footing with the rest of the population and be able to participate fully in society. Many CARICOM countries had national policies favouring the integration of disabled persons, encouraging their self-reliance and participation in socio-economic development and preventing their marginalization and all forms of discrimination against them.

20. Persons with disabilities, youth and older persons were normally supported by a common social unit, namely, the family. However, the family was being adversely affected by poverty, unemployment, urbanization and the breakdown of the moral and spiritual values that had sustained it. States members of CARICOM had therefore established counselling and training programmes and set up funds to assist needy families, particularly those headed by grandparents.

21. Social development required the integration and the participation of all members of society. The countries members of CARICOM remained committed to the vision of a society for all.

22. **Mr. Seiffert** (Norway) said that the third session of the World Youth Forum and the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held in August 1998 in Braga and Lisbon, respectively, had adopted a Youth Action Plan and a declaration that would assist Governments and the United Nations system in promoting the participation of youth at all levels in society.

23. In 1998, the international community had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nevertheless, such rights continued to be violated in many countries and young persons were frequently the victims of war crimes. The establishment of the International Criminal Court would make it possible to prosecute war criminals, and it was therefore essential for those States that had not yet signed the statute of the Court to do so as soon as possible.

24. Too many young people were still unaware of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and the protection offered to them by international human rights conventions and institutions. It would therefore be useful if the United Nations published a compendium of those rights, created a post of United Nations special rapporteur on youth rights, cooperated with non-governmental organizations and took into consideration in all its activities questions relating to youth, in particular by strengthening its youth unit. The participation of young people, who in many countries accounted for more than 50 per cent of the population, was essential to democracy. Young people wished and needed to be part of the political decision-making process and to be represented.

25. Youth organizations had an important role to play in peace- and democracy-building in post-conflict areas. Norwegian organizations were involved in such activities with their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe, Central America, southern Africa and the Middle East. Norway would encourage other Governments to provide youth organizations with the political and financial support that they needed to assist future leaders in strengthening respect for democracy, tolerance and dialogue.

26. For nearly 30 years, Norway had included representatives of youth organizations in its delegations. That practice had two advantages: the youth organizations promoted awareness of United Nations activities, and young people were given an opportunity to take part in the life of the international community. In view of the increasing number of challenges facing the world, the Organization should strengthen its role as a world forum.

27. **Ms. de Bondt** (Netherlands), drawing on her own experience of the increasing ethnic and cultural diversification taking place in most of the world's countries, including the Netherlands, said that young people must be integrated into society, without being denied an opportunity to develop their own identity. The participation of young people belonging to linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities was often hampered by such factors as the discrimination to which they were subjected, language barriers, or the difficulty of finding a job. Young second-generation immigrants, for example, had to live with two

different cultures – one transmitted by the family and one by the society in which they lived – and they faced difficulties that were not well understood by those who had no experience of their situation. That was why they sometimes tended to look for support from those with similar backgrounds, which was often perceived as a sign that they were not open to the rest of society.

28. In order to foster social integration and enable minorities to benefit from the educational system and give them unrestricted access to the labour market, it was important to promote better understanding among all social groups and adopt an open attitude towards minorities. The first step was to recognize that all people had a right to enjoy their own culture, as emphasized in article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. States must take appropriate measures to that end in accordance with the relevant international instruments and, in particular, must amend their legislation accordingly. She also stressed the special role of school in integrating minorities since it was there that members of different groups could begin to learn about each other's cultures. However, young people should also be given other opportunities to meet, for example, by participating in sports or the arts or by undertaking joint projects. Governments could provide incentives through clubs and community work and could organize workshops, youth camps and exchange programmes in order to encourage cooperation at the national and international levels.

29. She drew attention to the Braga Youth Action Plan which had been adopted at the third session of the United Nations World Youth Forum, and urged them to study it closely. The Plan of Action had been developed by 500 representatives of non-governmental youth organizations from all over the world and stressed the importance of exchanges of experience between young people from different cultures and religions.

30. **Mr. Melenevs'ky** (Ukraine) said that the current global economic crisis had clearly demonstrated the relationship between social and economic development, which had been stressed at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. In Ukraine, the impact of the crisis had led to lower incomes, higher unemployment and other social problems for many people. For that reason, the Government of Ukraine had undertaken urgent measures to ensure social protection of the most vulnerable segments of the population, in particular the aged, retired and disabled persons, and orphans. The purpose of those measures was to provide carefully targeted assistance to those groups by establishing a system of special services at different levels of the country's administrative divisions. Those measures went hand in hand with reform of the social security and pension systems.

31. Ukraine was faced with serious demographic problems that were aggravating its social problems: falling birth rates and an increase in the mortality rate meant that the country could not even sustain its population level. In Ukraine, as in other countries, the problem of an ageing population required the authorities to create more favourable living conditions for older persons. In that regard, the Government of Ukraine welcomed the decision to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, which would provide an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the problems faced by older persons and to seek solutions at the national and international levels. Preparations for the Year were under way in Ukraine: a presidential decree on the health of older persons had been issued in 1997, and a national committee on the observance of the Year of Older Persons had been established by government decree.

32. Like other countries, Ukraine attached great importance to the situation of disabled persons. It had incorporated the provisions of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in a number of State programmes, including a comprehensive programme on the solution of disability problems and a programme to develop the orthopaedic industry and provide disabled persons with means of movement and help them overcome their disabilities by mechanical means. The Government of Ukraine considered that the growing number of non-governmental organizations working on behalf of the disabled would contribute to their rehabilitation and active involvement in society.

33. Ukraine took a great interest in the problems of young people and in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. In accordance with a Ukrainian act on the promotion of youth in the social and development fields, the Ukrainian Government had established a network of youth centres. The Ukrainian Parliament was currently considering draft legislation on government bodies responsible for children and youth, and on social work with children and youth. The Ukrainian Government was grateful to the Government of Portugal for hosting the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon in August 1998, and welcomed the Organization's contribution to the process of social development through its support for national programmes and provision of technical, consultative and financial assistance, as well as assistance in the field of information. In particular, the Ukrainian Government welcomed the results of the thirty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development and of the

organizational session of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives and reaffirmed its sincere desire to continue its constructive dialogue with the various bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations with a view to reforming and revitalizing their work.

34. **Ms. Morgan-Moss** (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that solidarity was a universal concept that had contributed significantly to social development at the national and international levels. The Governments of the countries members of the Group were committed to the development of common policies and strategies for implementing social development programmes on behalf of vulnerable population groups. A large part of the populations of developing countries lived in squalor and poverty, and economic insecurity was increasing in most industrialized countries. While it was true that technological progress, population growth and other factors were of great importance to any economic system, all parties active in world affairs must play a role in their respective fields. Changes must not take place too quickly; they should be the result of reflection, lessons learned and discussion, and it was important to strike a balance between tradition and innovation. The taking of decisions for the common good and, in particular, the provision of financial assistance to poor countries, remained of great importance. By becoming involved in viable enterprises that could be passed on to future generations, generations that would thus be given a means of escaping from poverty, poor people themselves would become less vulnerable. The Rio Group had participated actively in the work of the Commission for Social Development and hoped that the agreed conclusions would provide guidance for Governments in adopting measures at the national, regional and international levels. The Group had also noted with satisfaction that the Commission for Social Development was cooperating with the Commission on Sustainable Development to study poverty and patterns of production and consumption, and that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was helping over 80 countries to adopt strategies to combat poverty. Non-governmental organizations also played an active role by reminding Government of the commitments that they had made in Copenhagen and raising public awareness of related activities.

35. Democracy was the orderly expression of different views, positions and interests. The Rio Group, which was made up of democratic countries, was aware that the concept of common humanity was based on the assumption that all individuals and, in particular, older and disabled persons, had equal opportunities to exercise their rights, assume their responsibilities and make use of all their abilities. The Rio Group was therefore endeavouring to combat the inequalities and other factors that prevented those groups from taking their place in society.

36. Many young people in the region faced common social problems such as delinquency, violence, drug addiction, corruption and a lack of civic responsibility. The concept of good and evil and the values common to all human beings should be inculcated in the minds of young persons. Those values went hand in hand with the diversity of ideas, opinions, customs and ways of life. The members of the Rio Group had actively participated in the recent World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, which had been generously hosted by the Portuguese Government from 8 to 12 August 1998 in Lisbon. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, the final document of the Conference, should help Governments to direct their youth policies. The views of young persons expressed in the Braga Youth Action Plan, adopted by the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system, should also be taken into account.

37. The family could not and should not lose sight of its purpose which was to teach the individual the rules of good conduct and moral principles. It remained the foundation of the human being for the transmission of values and codes of conduct from one generation to another. Because of the information which they spread throughout the world, the media played an increasingly important role in the establishment and dissemination of standards, values and aspirations. The Rio Group fully recognized their power and made them its partners in the search for the means of highlighting the moral, spiritual and intellectual qualities of human beings for the general good of the planet.

38. **Ms. Lacanlale** (Philippines) said that her Government continued to be guided by the Vienna Plan of Action on Ageing within the framework of its long-term national programmes on behalf of older persons and activities in celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. To that end, the Government had issued a Proclamation calling for the nationwide observance of the Year. A task force had been set up for that purpose and a series of major activities had been planned, including public information campaigns to raise awareness, advocacy activities, the adoption of measures aimed at protecting the rights of older persons and the organization of a major conference on ageing.

39. In the Philippines, as in other Asian countries, the family unit was traditionally multi-generational. Despite migration, urbanization and poverty, the family remained the

primary support system and main caregiver for older persons, as laid down in the Constitution. That policy was translated into programmes aimed at providing incentives for families to support older persons in order to help ease the Government's resource burden. In 1995, there were approximately 3.6 million older persons in the Philippines, representing 5.4 per cent of the total population. By the year 2000, that number should reach approximately 5 million. In view of the rapid increase in that population group, its influence on the economic and social development of the country could not be underestimated. The Government had therefore adopted measures to ensure the well-being of older persons: in particular, it had adopted a law aimed at maximizing their contribution to nation-building, which provided, *inter alia*, special privileges in health and transportation services. Another law mandated the establishment of senior citizen centres throughout the country in order to provide venues for social interaction and group activities. In addition, the Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, had embarked on a project to draw up a national programme for older persons in order to address the problems relating to the increasing number of older persons who were abandoned or ill-treated, who lived in deplorable conditions, who did not have adequate skills for gainful employment, or who were unable to provide adequate nutrition for themselves or to benefit from health care services. That plan reinforced another major programme of social reform undertaken by the Government which aimed at responding to the basic needs of the poorest and most vulnerable groups of society. Those programmes required vast resources, which, in view of the economic crisis in Asia, were lacking. Even though the Philippines was not as severely affected by the crisis as neighbouring countries, it had nonetheless suffered a sharp increase in the number of unemployed persons, which had risen from 2.5 million in June 1997 to 4.3 million in 1998. Inflation had risen from 4.6 per cent in 1997 to 9.9 per cent in June 1998. The economic downturn had also reduced Government revenue. Those elements, added to the devaluation of the Philippine peso, had led to a huge budget deficit. Despite the lack of resources, the Government was making every effort to avoid a reduction in social spending and was taking measures to support families which were dependent on agriculture and to encourage recourse to microcredit. The private sector had also introduced job retraining seminars for persons who were about to be made redundant.

40. In periods of crisis, people often turned towards the family for support. However, the family was no longer in a position to respond to the needs of older persons. It was therefore crucial to establish a culture of ageing and to regard older persons as both agents and beneficiaries of development efforts. To that end, it was important to adopt measures to encourage the independence and self-reliance of older persons. Particular attention should be paid to health and the accessibility of health resources and to a holistic and long-term strategy for ageing, taking into account the specific circumstances in each country. Non-governmental organizations and the private sector should also cooperate with the Government in the achievement of the goal of a society for all ages.

41. Her delegation wished to thank the Government of Portugal for having hosted the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon, and welcomed the commitments and recommendations contained in the Lisbon Declaration which would contribute to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. She looked forward to its adoption by the General Assembly at its next session.

42. **Ms. Ilham I. M. Ahmet** (Sudan), reaffirmed her Government's commitment to cooperate in the work of the Third Committee, and said that social development was closely linked to economic development, peace and stability. In that regard, the Sudanese Government, within the framework of the efforts it was making to achieve a peaceful solution to the problem of the South, had complied with the ceasefire appeals made by the international community including the Security Council of the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the European Union. Nevertheless war continued and the suffering of the people in the area was becoming more intense because the rebels had refused to respect the ceasefire.

43. With regard to issues related to youth, her delegation pointed out that the Lisbon Declaration stressed that Governments should make a commitment to adopt youth policies in line with the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, taking into account the national priorities and specific circumstances of each country. Convinced that youth represented the main driving force for development, her Government had implemented a comprehensive national strategy and defined the criteria to guarantee the rights of youth, as presented during the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system held in Lisbon. In accordance with the World Programme of Action for Youth, the Sudan had also launched activities for the benefit of youth, particularly in the cultural and intellectual spheres, and encouraged young people to do their national service in order to develop their skills. The Government provided greater job opportunities for young people and

supported projects initiated by them by helping them to acquire the necessary resources from financing agencies. Conscious of the importance of education, the Government had established a university in each of the 26 federated States over the past five years. Its efforts had not been limited to the education of youth, but were aimed at achieving the objective of education for all. The Government was also endeavouring to eradicate illiteracy particularly in remote regions. As a consequence, children in all regions had access to primary education and the Government was working towards improving the situation of teachers and had accorded high priority to technical education.

44. A particular concern for Sudan was the situation of older persons and it therefore welcomed the decision to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. In accordance with the principles inspired by Islam, older persons in the Sudan enjoyed a privileged and respected position within the family and society. The Government encouraged that approach and stressed the importance of the participation of older persons in production and development on an equal basis with other citizens. The mass media were instrumental in ensuring the wide dissemination of such concepts and norms.

45. The Sudan also strove to achieve the complete integration of persons with disabilities into society. It had therefore established institutes and agencies for the rehabilitation of such persons to provide them with the education and training that they needed in order to attain self-reliance. The Government had conducted media campaigns to raise public awareness and steps had been taken to circulate as widely as possible the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

46. All international conferences emphasized the importance of protecting the rights of the family. The Sudan was of the view that the family should be protected from the social diseases that were rife in the modern world as a result of the tendency in contemporary societies to diminish the role of the family and, indeed, to twist the definition of the term. For the Sudan, the family was the natural framework in which the individual developed in preparation for integration into society. The Government had therefore adopted a policy for facilitating marriage, which was the basis for building a family. It had also paid special attention to the situation of rural and migrant families, and of widows and orphans. Furthermore, it had established national projects for the provision of shelter and clothing to the families affected by the attacks of the rebel army in southern Sudan, where the Government had constructed "peace villages" to meet such families' needs. It had also assisted the victims of the recent floods in the country.

47. Given the deterioration in the world's social situation, the fact that globalization was a reality and the acknowledgement that social development could not be separated from economic development, a comprehensive approach should be adopted in order to address the situation. It was essential, however, to bear in mind that the establishment of a single system that did not acknowledge the different cultures and traditions of each society would not lead to the achievement of social development.

48. **Ms. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that the views of the Government of Ecuador on the item under consideration had already been expressed in the statements made by the representatives of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77, and by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Rio Group. On the eve of the new millennium, the improvement in life expectancy was probably the most striking development in the social sphere. In 1982, at a session of the World Assembly on Ageing, a number of Governments, in particular those of developing countries, had thought that people over the age of 65 were a characteristic of the developed world, but statistics showed that it was in the developing countries that the ageing of the population had increased most rapidly; efforts should therefore be made to ensure a life of dignity for current generations, for instance by the adoption of policies to enable them to participate in productive activities. In that regard, international cooperation, especially through assistance from countries with a highly developed social security system, was of particular importance.

49. Her delegation had played an active part in the work of various intergovernmental bodies which considered the problems of older persons, and welcomed the fact that the theme of the International Year of Older Persons was "towards a society for all ages". As a young country, where 48 per cent of the population was below the age of 18, Ecuador could not be indifferent to the future of such a high proportion of the population. The Government had therefore introduced a programme to raise awareness of third age problems, under which seminars and workshops had been organized at the national, provincial and cantonal levels with the emphasis on the dissemination of information on legislation relating to older persons, and the National Land Transport Council had, *inter alia*, brought in reduced fares for older persons. In addition, plans and programmes to benefit older persons – including a plan to take older persons' rights into account in preparing national policies – had been set up in close coordination with public and private institutions and non-governmental organizations.

50. Her delegation thanked the Portuguese Government for having organized the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth most efficiently. The Government of Ecuador pursued a policy of social involvement under which young people actively participated in their own development. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the Braga Youth Action Plan would form part of a strategy of integration into a society for all ages.

51. **Ms. Aponte De Zacklin** (Venezuela) said that her delegation fully supported the statements made by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Rio Group and by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77. She wished, however, to stress the importance of two developments relevant to the situation of the most vulnerable groups, namely the recent World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the issuance of the report on preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294). In organizing its social programme, Venezuela aimed to improve living conditions for such groups, while at the same time working to ensure economic development, justice and peace.

52. With regard to young people, a foundation had been established to carry out programmes aimed at giving them the skills to find innovative solutions to their problems. Two programmes seemed particularly promising: the first – the youth employment plan – sought to give training opportunities to young school drop-outs and to make full use of the country's human resources in order to create favourable conditions for the full development of young people, while at the same time laying the foundation for a more just and equitable society in Venezuela. The aim of the second – the prevention and participation programme for young people – was to set up a network of activities in order to give young people responsibility in training and changing the individual and society. The two programmes had produced good results in a number of fields, including the prevention of juvenile crime, drug addiction, AIDS, violence, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and alcoholism among the young. Her country had also promoted parallel social integration measures, such as the "Sport for all" programme and the National Children's Symphony Orchestra.

53. With regard to programmes for older persons, her delegation commended the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons on its efforts to promote the Year. Her country had embarked on programmes to help older persons, including the national plan for the third age. That plan was being implemented by the National Geriatric and Gerontological Institute, which provided various services to older persons throughout the country. In urban areas, courses were provided for older persons, enabling them to re-enter the productive sector and thus preserve the country's cultural heritage and traditions. The concept of a society for all ages, every aspect of which was covered by the Secretary-General's report (A/53/294), could be seen as a first step in a dialogue between the ephemeral – vanity, power, youth and, indeed, life – and the eternal – the spirit, the vital principle which acted as a guide from the beginning of a person's life to the end.

54. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that social questions were central to international politics, as abundantly proved only recently by the financial crisis in Asia and its unexpected impact on the living conditions of millions of individuals, both in the region itself and in other parts of the world. No sector was spared the negative repercussions of globalization and no one was shielded from the threats of impoverishment that were the regrettable concomitants of this process. It was therefore essential to seek, both internationally and within the framework of the United Nations, global responses that were capable of addressing the challenges facing humankind, just as it was also essential to fight as a team against poverty. The Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development continued to serve as common references in view of their relevance and currency. With the special session of the General Assembly scheduled for the year 2000 in mind, the implementation and follow-up of commitments entered into by Governments should undergo critical assessment. His delegation was determined to make its contribution, in the Preparatory Committee, to the success of that important gathering.

55. He welcomed the outcome of the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and thanked the Portuguese Government for having taken the initiative to organize it, in conjunction with the United Nations, particularly since it had culminated in a consensus on youth issues, as evidenced by the Lisbon Declaration on Youth, which fell within the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond adopted by the General Assembly. It equally welcomed the Secretary-General's report on preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294), which should successfully reaffirm the place and role of older persons in a society that must remain "a : ciety for all ages". Advantage should therefore be taken of the opportunity provided by the commemoration of the Year in 1999 to reaffirm the 18 United Nations principles for Older Persons annexed to General Assembly resolution 46/91, as well as the International Plan of Action on Ageing, which could inspire countries to set their objectives on the subject of ageing. Senegal, which was already engaged in preparations for the

Year, believed that the resources available to the Trust Fund for Ageing should be strengthened with a view to enabling the developing countries to benefit from the necessary technical assistance.

56. Realization of the objectives of social development presupposed a greater degree of participation by the population in civil, political and cultural life, as well as the strengthening of the status of law and democracy and the promotion of a social-integration policy. It further presupposed a policy of combating vulnerability and poverty with productive employment, in addition to the development of microcredit, easier access to basic social services and a profound ongoing dialogue between the State, non-governmental organizations and civil society concerning implementation of the objectives fixed at the World Summit for Social Development. Moreover, it required that the social dimension should be taken into account in economic and financial restructuring and adjustment programmes. The international community should mobilize fresh resources in order to meet the expectations of peoples who were victims of malnutrition and disease and to wage an effective fight against poverty. Senegal, which already had a national programme in that field, believed that the United Nations should gear its action more towards development and solidarity among nations.

57. **Mr. Bhatti** (Pakistan) said that he particularly regretted the negative trends in the world social situation (highlighted by the Human Development Report 1998 of the United Nations Development Programme), as his country believed that sustained economic growth and employment generation were two basic elements for the promotion of social integration and societal harmony. He hoped that the Lisbon Declaration on Youth, adopted at the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, would serve as the flagship of active youth participation in development at the national, regional and international levels. Pakistan itself laid special emphasis on the provision of quality education and professional training for its youth in order to prepare them for playing a productive role in building the nation. It had also prioritized the expansion of job opportunities for youth. In its eighth five-year plan, over 5 million additional jobs would be created and similar emphasis on job creation would continue in the next five-year plan.

58. It was predicted that the ageing of the population, a consequence of scientific and technological development, would be faster in the developing countries than in the developed countries. The International Year of Older Persons would provide an opportunity to evaluate the likely impact of that demographic change on societies. With 40 per cent of its population now in its teens, Pakistan would be more acutely affected by the ageing process and it had therefore already initiated a public awareness campaign. Traditionally, the family shouldered the responsibility for older persons, who were regarded as the fountainhead of wisdom, experience and guidance, rather than as a burden. The Government nevertheless assisted families through special incentives to ensure the care of older people. Various old-age benefit schemes, including pensions, had been instituted to ensure income security for older people.

59. His Government had introduced numerous measures to integrate disabled persons, the most vulnerable section of the population; it had launched awareness-raising campaigns and set up institutions that would impart skills to disabled persons in order to make them productive partners in development. Special quotas had also been reserved for them in the public and private sectors, while safety nets had been developed for marginalized groups and those who had been by-passed or adversely affected by economic and social change. Four social-support schemes were now in operation for the benefit of various categories of the most disadvantaged social groups.

60. Viewing education as a vehicle for the promotion of human development and the alleviation of poverty, Pakistan had launched a social-action programme in 1997, in which special emphasis was laid on elementary and secondary education. By the year 2010, it proposed to achieve the target of 99 per cent enrolment for boys and 93 per cent enrolment for girls at the elementary level. A compulsory-education act was already being implemented in Punjab province and was about to be introduced in other provinces.

61. *Ms. Sandru (Romania), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

62. **Mr. Gambari** (Nigeria) said that his country was extremely concerned by the increasing neglect of older persons, especially in the developing countries, where the deteriorating economic circumstances were a contributing factor. It had therefore created a social welfare department and a rehabilitation department. It had also initiated a family support programme which, in addition to assisting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, promoted the well-being of the family with a view to enabling its members to make the maximum contribution to national development. The programme's specific objective was to eradicate negative social and cultural factors that affected the elderly and to address any discrepancies that might exist between older men and older women. Given that the majority of older persons worldwide were women, as acknowledged by the Secretary-General in his report on preparations for the

International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294), it was imperative that global activities during that Year should give due consideration to the peculiar problems which older persons faced. His delegation particularly welcomed part III of the report, which underscored the importance attached to the family as a whole in order to achieve a society for all ages. The alarming consequences of the tempo of ageing in the developing countries was also clearly indicated. In Nigeria, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, the focal point of preparation for the International Year, had organized, in conjunction with non-governmental organizations, a special seminar on the role of the aged in national development. The Ministry would also be elaborating a programme of activities as a follow-up to the official observance, on 2 October 1998, of the International Day of Older Persons.

63. In connection with youth, who were important to the establishment of a society for all ages, Nigeria had been effectively represented at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. It welcomed its successful outcome and was fully committed to implementing, with like-minded members of the international community, the programmes contained in the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, as well as the Braga Youth Action Plan, adopted by the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System in August 1998.

64. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) said that, over four years after the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, States still faced serious problems, both objective and subjective, in implementing the provisions thereof.

65. Despite its difficult economic situation, the Russian Government was endeavouring to attenuate the adverse social consequences of the crisis, prevent the standard of living from falling, partially compensate for the losses suffered by the most vulnerable population groups and support the most needy members of society. It was endeavouring to take into account the basic guidelines established at the World Summit for Social Development and, to that end, had launched a federal programme of social reforms to be implemented by the year 2000 as well as special programmes on behalf of young people, children, older persons, families and the disabled, which, unlike preceding programmes, included practical, realistic goals.

66. However, his Government considered that, in addition to efforts at the national level, assistance from the international community and, above all, from the United Nations, was essential. By ensuring the universality of the multilateral trade system and of stable, predictable conditions for access to international markets in goods and services, particularly for countries in transition, and by eliminating all forms of trade discrimination, it would be easier to resolve social problems. There was also a need for an international monitoring mechanism to ensure greater compliance with bilateral regulations and obligations in that area. The Secretary-General, in his report on the work of the Organization (A/53/1), had emphasized the need to renew international economic cooperation for development through partnership, an idea supported by the Russian Federation.

67. With respect to international action in the social field, Russia had given its immediate support to the idea of holding a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, and was participating actively in the work of the Preparatory Committee out of a conviction that that session would promote the development of strategies and programmes on behalf of vulnerable population groups. In that regard, it welcomed preparations for the International Year of Older Persons and the United Nations Secretariat's work on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

68. The Russian Federation, for its part, had established a national committee responsible for preparations for the Year. To that end, the Commonwealth of Independent States had created an organizational committee pursuant to a decision taken by the Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth in March 1998.

69. The Russian Federation also welcomed the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held in Lisbon in 1998. However, the Russian Government was convinced that there remained unexploited opportunities for coordination within the United Nations at the system-wide level in implementation of the decisions taken at the World Summit. In particular, the Commission for Social Development could provide greater support for the implementation efforts of interested countries. Better use could also be made of the capacities of non-governmental organizations. In that respect, the Russian Federation supported measures aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Commission for Social Development by strengthening its role, particularly in the area of monitoring the implementation of decisions.

70. In conclusion, his delegation supported efforts to ensure that international cooperation under the aegis of the United Nations focused more closely on social issues and that the organization's activities gave a higher priority to

such issues. It was ready to cooperate for that purpose with the United Nations and all interested countries.

71. **Mr. Miller** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO had participated actively in the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and fully supported the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the Braga Youth Action Plan adopted by the World Youth Forum, both of which focused on various questions of direct interest to ILO. The Lisbon Declaration, in particular, was aimed at increasing employment opportunities for young people and at taking steps to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

72. ILO was working towards a convention intended to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including all forms of slavery, child prostitution and the use of children for illegal activities or for work likely to jeopardize their health, safety and future; the convention was expected to be adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1999.

73. In June 1998, the International Labour Conference had adopted a resolution on youth employment which called on member States to take measures to increase employment opportunities for young people while ensuring employment protection for them. There was also a need for an international strategy for youth employment and for dissemination of best-practice information in that area. The Conference had also adopted a Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work, which stressed that all member States had an obligation to respect, promote and realize the principles concerning fundamental rights at work which were the subject of ILO conventions on freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. That declaration should make it possible to improve working conditions for young people and to promote their meaningful participation in social and economic development.

74. The question of youth employment was closely related to that of the provision of social security and protection to older persons. ILO fully subscribed to General Assembly resolution 47/5, which had proclaimed 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons; it was involved in the problems of older workers and, for that reason, focused particularly on social-protection systems and retirement-pension schemes. It had noted with concern that many countries needed to reform their old-age pension systems, or, where none existed, to establish new ones. It therefore provided its members with advice and assistance with respect to the various alternatives and their merits and disadvantages and their suitability to the circumstances and traditions of each country, taking into account the principles embodied in international labour standards.

75. With respect to disabled persons, ILO Convention No. 159 (1983) on the vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons emphasized the right of those persons to vocational or other training which would provide them with employment opportunities and required member States to design and adopt policies to facilitate disabled persons' access to employment. To that end, ILO provided guidance and technical assistance to its members. Moreover, in its *World Employment Report, 1998–1999*, ILO had stressed the need to provide training for disabled workers, youth, the long-term unemployed and older displaced workers as the most vulnerable groups in the labour market in order to improve their employment prospects.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.